

Recap of Devils Swamp Lake Site Meeting on April 23, 2009

Bart Cañellas, Remedial Project Manager provided an overview of the Superfund process. He explained the steps and referred to the process and flow chart in the front of the room.

Don Williams covered the enforcement first part of the presentation. He explained there are 66 potentially responsible parties (PRPs), and it takes a long time to come up with an agreement on how to proceed with that many people involved in the negotiations. The immediate danger at the site is consumption of the fish and shellfish from the area, which is why a fish advisory is in effect..

Keith Casanova, LDEQ, explained that the fish advisory went into effect in October 1987 and was expanded in 1993 to include, Devils Swamp, Devils Swamp Lake and Bayou Baton Rouge. The current advisory recommends that fish caught in the restricted areas be consumed at no more than two meals per month. A meal is defined as two 8 oz .portions for adults and two 4 oz. portions for children.)

Darcie Olexia Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, also discussed the advisory. She told meeting participants to remove and discard all visible fat and skin from fish to reduce the amount of fat consumed. She emphasized that the fatty areas are where the PCBs accumulate.

QUESTIONS: AND COMMENTS

We don't know the boundaries of the lake and swamp. The swamp actually extends into the neighborhood and is on both sides of Scenic Hwy 61.

Bart Cañellas and Don Williams explained that the actual site, represented on the map, is only west of the Hwy.

Question/Comment from audience member: What's the next step for residents? We have health problems in the community. We are forced to shelter in place and we never know what's going on in the surrounding industrial sites. The air smells and sometimes our homes shake in the night. Most of the old people are sick or have already passed away. We need to be relocated and provided with educational opportunities for the future of our children.

Question from audience member: I lost cows in that area... 900, 700 head on the other side; what's going to be done about that?

Don Williams: These issues are beyond Superfund and beyond the Devils Swamp Site, which we are here tonight to address. The Superfund program is designed to address sites that are abandoned.

The government backs the clean-up of the site, when the PRPs won't do the work or aren't capable.

Question from audience member: What about the landfills?

The landfills are licensed by the State and that would be an issue to discuss with the LDEQ.

Question from audience member: Explain what the EPA and LDEQ are going to do for us.

The missions of the EPA and LDEQ are to protect Human Health and the Environment. We can have people attend future meetings that can address issues out side of remediation. Rollins has already cleaned up the ditch and installed a treatment plant for wastewater, which is now released into the river through a pipeline. This has been permitted and regulated by the State.

Question from audience member: What's going to stop the landfill from doing the same type of things that where done in the past and endangering the community?

Compliance to standards are regulated by the State. There are guidelines that are checked regularly and water monitoring wells to protect the water supply. Whatever goes into the landfill stays in the landfill.

Don Williams: I am going to go back and approach our folks about us coming out on a regular basis and visit with you folks to keep you informed. Also the possibility of a newsletter. What's the best way to get the information out and communicate with the community?

Answer from audience: The way we did it for this meeting going door-to-door, mail and advertising.

Comment from Danny (audience member): Back in the sixties and seventies they had colored water coming out into the ditch that was smoking, and we were exposed to it and people are dying of cancer. We all got to get out of this place and you need to move us. I fought for this in the war for this country, these people need help! People are dying in Alsen from cancer!

Question from Bobbie Williams: What step are you on? Why can't we move forward, when is there going to be another investigation? Why isn't there a time process? Is this on the web?

Don Williams: Investigation, Step #3. We don't need to wait for listing if we can get the PRPs to the table to agree. Listing doesn't stop the process; if we can't reach a resolution with the PRPs then we will have to clean it up. The only exposure at present is eating the Fish. The contaminant is in the sediment at the bottom of the lake and as time passes the contaminated sediment gets covered by fresh silt and becomes less accessible to the fish. The information is on the Region 6 website available to the public.

Comment from audience member: There is a high rate of cancer in the area right now. Our water is contaminated and we get it from two wells in the community!

These are very deep wells. (Response from LDEQ)

Comment from audience member: Is there a grandfather clause in the Superfund to excuse the violations of the past? What about money for the community?

Don Williams: A grand father clause doesn't exist in Superfund. The only retribution an individual or community has against the PRP is through civil court, not Superfund.

Question from audience member: Because the Swamp and Lake are always flooding, are contaminants being washed downstream? Why not contain it where it is?

Don Williams: Actually the contaminants are in the sediment, and the flooding actually places new sediment in the area on top of the contaminated sediment at the bottom. This actually makes the contaminants less accessible to the fish and crawfish.

Comment from audience member: We need relocation!

Don Williams: We don't do that kind of thing in the Superfund but will have someone here to better answer that question at our next meeting.

Question from audience member: How many man hours have you already spend on this and what about all the money being wasted, you could have already cleaned it up.

Don Williams: We don't know exactly but that is part of what we will recover from the PRPs.

Question from audience member: What about our Grandkids? What about a time line? Why not get them in court and come back and discuss this with the community?

Don Williams: A time line for the clean up will be developed, when we reach that part of the process. It is not our responsibility to report to the community on our negotiations, but we will get back to you when a decision is reached and develop a plan which you will be able to comment on in a formal process. When we come back and we will have an exchange of information, and will hopefully be able to bring the people with us that can answer more of your questions.